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(54) Title: SYSTEM FOR ESTABLISHING LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR WAIVABLE TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS VIA A WEB SITE

(57) Abstract: A method for providing legal representation with respect to traffic violations for which a court appearance may be waived, is performed via website.



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## **SYSTEM FOR ESTABLISHING LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR WAIVABLE TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS VIA A WEB SITE**

### **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention relates generally to methods of providing legal services, and more particularly to a method of establishing legal representation for waivable traffic violations via a worldwide web site.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

An estimated 34 million speeding tickets are issued to drivers on American highways each year. A ticket is a summons to appear in court and answer charges of a traffic law violation, usually exceeding a speed limit, made by a police officer. Ignoring the ticket can have serious consequences, but addressing it imposes significant burdens on a driver. A driver may generally remit a stated fine in lieu of appearing in traffic court. These fines are often substantial. Payment of the fine amounts to a "guilty" plea to the charged violation, and is customarily entered into the driver's motor vehicle records, maintained at the appropriate administrative agency. Insurers when issuing or renewing automobile insurance policies search motor vehicle records. The presence of citations on a driver's motor vehicle record can result in significant insurance premium surcharges for several years, amounting to significantly more than the cost of the ticket.

Most drivers are unaware of the many options that may be open to them to mitigate these costs. Such options include reducing the severity of the ticket through a plea bargain with the district attorney, taking advantage of waivers for certain offenses offered by insurers to drivers with a clean record, or other court options such as deferred adjudication, whereby the ticket is reduced or eliminated after a probationary period.

To take advantage of these options, many drivers choose to appear in traffic court and contest the ticket. Due to the routine nature of traffic offenses, many of them are "waivable." A waivable offense is one in which an individual willing to plead guilty/responsible may waive a

personal appearance in court, allowing an attorney to appear on his or her behalf to enter and negotiate the plea. To avoid the time and inconvenience required to make personal traffic court appearances, many drivers prefer to retain the services of an attorney to deal with the traffic ticket. Others are not aware of the benefits of retaining an attorney, or do not know how to locate one that specializes in traffic offenses.

Attorneys' fees for waivable traffic violations are large considering the time and effort required to plead each traffic case in court, due primarily to the time attorneys and their staff must spend with each client. Over the years, the legal profession has attempted to address this issue, and provide more efficient and cost-effective legal services relating to traffic violations. One such approach is the establishment of "direct mail" notification, to those who have been issued traffic citations, of the availability of specialized legal services. However, most state bars' ethics rules place various restrictions on attorneys who engage in direct-mail notification, including, for example, a mandatory delay or waiting period between the date the citation is issued and the date an attorney may mail a notification to the driver.

While attorneys' direct mail notification of their services to ticketed drivers has been effective in informing drivers of their options and reducing attorneys' fees, these fees remain relatively high, especially in terms of the work required. Moreover, representation of clients via direct-mail notification still requires personal communication between the client and the attorney or his or her staff. The number of cases an attorney can handle at any given time is limited, not by the demands of pleading clients' cases in court, but rather by the demands of processing clients through the traditional law office practice model.

A need thus exists for a system of locating and engaging ticketed drivers that allows mass processing of drivers' case information and fee payment, allowing the attorney to focus his or her time and talent on the resolution of clients' cases in court. Such a system would lend itself to use on a regional or even national basis.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a block diagram of the computer network through which the web site of the present invention may be accessed;

Figure 2 is a block diagram of the software modules of the present invention;

Figure 3 is a flowchart of the method of establishing representation of the present invention;

Figures 4a and 4b are a flowchart describing a user's interaction with the web site of the present invention;

Figure 5 is a block diagram depicting a representative hierarchy of web sites according to one embodiment of the present invention.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an efficient and economic manner of establishing legal representation for a specific class of traffic violations, namely those for which the court appearance can be waived. The present invention allows for a low cost of legal representation, with minimal inconvenience to the client. A worldwide web site and software enable this quick and efficient manner of establishing legal representation.

The web site provides general information to the client concerning traffic violations, and explaining the representation. It obtains biographical and case information from the client, republishing the information to the client for verification. The web site provides the client a representation agreement if the client's information conforms to predetermined parameters, and obtains from the client affirmative acceptance of the representation agreement and an agreement to waive an appearance at court. A fee is then obtained from the client, such as through a credit card transaction, and the attorney is notified of the representation and provided the waiver and client information.

## **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention is particularly contemplated as being a web-based solution to the desires of drivers cited for waivable traffic offenses to easily and economically obtain legal representation to minimize the deleterious effects of the citation. The present invention comprises both a method of contacting and engaging drivers in need of representation, and the web site and software used to facilitate representation of an individual who has received a waivable traffic offense. The individual having received a citation is referred to herein variously as a "driver," a web site "user," or a "client." These terms describe the same person, but each is used when describing different a phase or step of the present invention. For example, when an individual first receives a citation, he or she may be referred to as a driver. The web site operation is explained in terms of interaction with a user. Once the web site user accepts representation and remits a fee, and his case is accepted by the attorney, he becomes a client.

### **Computer and Networking Hardware and Software**

Figure 1 illustrates in a block diagram format a network of computers, indicated generally at 100, that may be used by the present invention. In particular, a host computer 110 is connected to one or more remote computers 116 through the Internet by users 114. A "computer" is defined herein as any data processing device including microprocessors, conventional personal computers, personal digital assistants, mobile terminals or phones, and the like. The term is meant to be construed broadly.

A user 114 may use a remote computer 116 to access the Internet 118, such as through an Internet Service Provider, such as BELLSOUTH.NET™, GTE.NET™, or the like. Specifically contemplated would be accessing the World Wide Web with a web browser and from there accessing a web page hosted by the host computer 110. The web page would act as an interface for the software 200.

While the Internet 118 is contemplated as the network by which communication between remote computers 116 and the host computer 110 is accomplished, other networks, proprietary or public could equivalently be substituted. Additionally, there are numerous networks, both satellite and terrestrial that may be combined to create such a network. Such subsidiary networks could comprise a cellular network, a telephone network, a cable network, or the like. The physical network connection for host computer 110 and the remote computers 116 could be wired connections, such as telephone lines, digital subscriber lines, TV cables, fiber-optic links, and the like, and/or wireless connections, such as microwave, cellular, radio, satellite links, and the like.

Host computer 110 may be a personal computer with a microprocessor therein, or may be a dedicated network server or the like as needed or desired and may include memory 112 with software 200 stored thereon. Memory 112 may be a hard drive, flash memory, EEPROM, CD-ROM, optical CD, floppy disk, DVD-ROM, magnetic tape, or other form of computer memory as is well understood in the field of computers.

Software 200 includes applications programmed to execute the present invention and may be written in any appropriate code as needed or desired. The present trend, as exemplified by the personal computer operating system WINDOWS®, is to merge operating systems and application software and particularly browser software. Thus, it is contemplated that the consumer interface in most embodiments will emulate or in fact be a function of a web browser, although this is not specifically required by the present invention. It is contemplated that the remote computers 116 will be personal computers with the appropriate communications software, although as WEB-TV and other existing services attempt to shift the need from client processing power to server provided processing power, the present invention accommodates such alternate devices as well. As will be described below, software 200 may be distributed or located at a unitary site.

It should be appreciated that the structure of the host computer 110 and the software 200 is provided as an example, and is not intended to be limiting. Other variations on the structure of the host computer 110 or the software 200 are specifically contemplated. Thus, while the host computer 110 has been described as a centralized computer at one physical location, those skilled

in the art will appreciate that the host computer 110 could use other architectures to accomplish the same functionality. In another embodiment, the host computer 110 could be a distributed system with multiple computer systems, each of them comparable to the centralized host computer 110 described above, and located at one physical location, linked together through a local area network (LAN). Each of the computer systems performs part of the tasks in a centralized host computer system. In yet another embodiment, the host computer 110 could be a distributed system with multiple computer systems scattered across a number of physical locations, but linked together through a wide area network (WAN). Each of the computer systems may also perform only one part of the tasks of a centralized host computer system.

As would be expected, the host computer 110 may perform the main processing operations of the present invention with the remote computers 116 acting primarily as input/output devices to allow users 114 to communicate with the host computer 110. However, processing functions could be performed at the remote computers 116 as needed or desired.

While the remote computers 116 are contemplated as being personal computers, they in fact could be a wide range of devices such as a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, network kiosks, network capable appliances, or the like. Additionally, the computer 116 could be a large centralized computer system, a distributed computer system connected through a LAN, a distributed computer system located at several remote locations connected through a WAN, and the like as needed or desired.

It is specifically contemplated that the host computer 110 may be connected to the Internet 118 at all times and therefore should be adapted to have a fail safe and hot-swappable structure. This will allow continued operation even in the event of isolated failures within the system. Additionally, the software 200 may be backed-up regularly, as is well known in the industry, to recover in the event of a catastrophic failure.

A brief overview of the general functions of the software 200 will be helpful for an understanding of the invention. An exemplary version of the software 200 is seen in Figure 2, which depicts some of the modules of the software 200 in block format. Software 200 may

include a central processing module 222, an input and validation module 224, a display module 226, a memory access module 228, and database access module 230.

Processing module 222 receives input from the input and validation module 224 and displays information with the assistance of the display module 226. It should be appreciated that the input and validation module 224 receives and interprets commands from a keyboard, a mouse, or other input devices as needed or desired. Further, the input module 224 should have the capacity to receive commands locally at the host computer 110 or from a remote computer 116. Thus, there may be appropriate communications software included within the input and validation module 224 if needed. Additionally, input and validation module 224 performs a variety of checks on data input by users 114, as is more fully explained below. There should additionally be modules within the memory access module 228 designed to write files to memory (228A) and load files from memory (228B). Depending on the particular memory 112 used with the host computer 110, different drivers may be required, but such is considered well within the ordinary skill of one in the computer arts. Database access module 230 contains all functionality required to search, retrieve, modify, and store information residing in a database, where the database may reside with and comprise a part of host computer 110 or alternatively may comprise a third-party database (not shown) accessed by host computer 110 as needed or desired according to methods well known in the art.

### **The Method of Establishing Legal Counsel**

The present invention will be described herein with reference to Figure 3, from the point of view of an attorney experienced in handling traffic cases, who wishes to provide representation to clients known to be in need of such representation, in a cost-effective manner.

Many attorneys provide notification of their services to potential clients known to have received citations for traffic offenses, for example, by direct mail. The list of recipients of traffic citations is public information, available in most states through the administrative office of a court



with jurisdiction over motor vehicle law infractions. Many court administrative offices have automated this data, and interested parties may search a database and download the information. In other jurisdictions, the information is available under a subscription arrangement, and is supplied at regular intervals, such as by daily email. In still other areas, the data is maintained manually, and interested parties must search written records at the courthouse or the relevant law enforcement agency office. However obtained, the data base or compiled information setting forth those individuals charged with a traffic violation can be sorted so as to identify selected traffic violations and the identity of those charged with such (see box 310). Of particular interest regarding the present invention is identification of individuals charged with waivable traffic offenses, i.e., those to which an individual willing to plead guilty/responsible may waive a personal appearance in court, allowing an attorney to appear on his or her behalf to enter and negotiate the plea.

Drivers charged with waivable offenses are contacted, and supplied with identifying information regarding the attorney's web site (see box 320). Preferably, this identifying information comprises the Internet domain name of the site, and most preferably, it comprises the uniform resource locator (URL) associated with the site. The step of contacting known cited drivers may be performed in a variety of ways, such as by direct mail, by telephone, email, etc. However, this contact is often regulated by state bar ethics rules, and the attorney must conform his process of contacting drivers to those rules. Additionally, the attorney may advertise his web site to the public, again in conformance with state bar ethics rules. Hence, the potential client may already know of the web site, and thus his notification of it need not necessarily follow his receipt of a traffic ticket.

Following notification, or knowledge of the web site, the driver or potential client visits the web site by directing a web browser to the URL of the site (see box 330).

The web site is interactive, meaning that the content displayed to the user changes in response to the user's input of data, and selections and choices made while viewing the web site. As is more fully described herein below, information obtained from the user during his or her

interaction with the web site is sufficient to allow the attorney or legal representative to represent the individual regarding the waivable traffic offense (see box 340).

At the conclusion of the user's interaction with the web site, information is provided to the attorney about the user and his or her traffic offense. The attorney may then review this information and decide whether or not to take on representation of the client (see box 350).

If the attorney decides to represent the driver in the waivable matter, then an attorney-client relationship is established, the information obtained at the interactive web site is placed in the client's file, and the matter is added to the attorney's docket (see box 360). At this point, the normal flow of client representation according to the traditional law office model continues. The specifics of the representation vary widely from one law firm to the next, and thus are not further discussed herein.

As the attorney expands his or her practice by capitalizing on the increased efficiency of client representation according to the present invention, it is envisioned that the attorney will engage in various ongoing relationships with qualified attorneys in geographically remote areas, in order to provide local, statewide, regional, or national service through the web site. In any case of associated counsel, the attorney will forward the client and case information obtained via the web site to the associate counsel (see box 70). Since the attorney is associating with local counsel in the representation, and is not providing an attorney referral service, he or she along with local counsel remain counsel of record. The attorney will thus await the disposition of the case (see box 380). Upon completion of the appearance in court by the local council, and notification to the attorney thereof, the attorney will forward a fee to the local council (see box 390). Variations of the specifics of these steps and their order of execution may vary while remaining within the scope of the present invention. For example, associated counsel may be compensated on a periodic basis, or in advance of the court date.

### The Web Site

The web site according to the present invention allows an attorney to engage in representation of a client for a waivable traffic offense in an efficient and cost-effective manner, by bypassing the traditional law office practice model of extensive personal contact between the attorney or his or her staff and the client. The web site collects information about the client and the facts of his or her case, screens potential clients by checking certain facts concerning the traffic offense to assure that they are of the type and nature amenable to disposition by the type of representation enabled by the web site. The web site presents the client with a representation agreement and other legal documents necessary to enable and establish the representation. Additionally, the web site obtains the client's consent to the representation and collects a fee. Finally, the web site automatically provides the client with a receipt and confirmation of the representation, and notifies the attorney, providing him or her with all information gathered.

Referring to Figures 4a and 4b, which depict in flowchart form the basic functions performed by the web site of the present invention (indicated generally at 400), the client initially visits the web site by directing a web browser to its URL (box 402). The client would be greeted with an introductory screen, generally explaining the web site and offering several options for the user to continue.

As one option, the user could select to receive background information (see box 405). This information could comprise, for example, general information relating to traffic offenses and how a driver's motor vehicle record affects his or her insurance rates. A local or statewide web site may provide detailed information regarding that state's motor vehicle laws and insurance regulations. A web site of regional or national scope may first require the user to select a particular state, so that detailed and accurate information about the user's state laws may be provided. This selection may be through a unique choice selection.

As used herein, the term "unique choice selection" refers to an aspect of interactive web site usage whereby the user is presented with a unique list of pre-defined options, and invited to select one and only one of the options. A unique choice selection may take several forms. It may,

for example comprise a drop-down menu, as created by the SELECT element in the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) of a web site design and construction. In a SELECT menu, the user is presented with an option in a text box, with an arrow button to one side of the box. The initial option may be one of the available options, i.e. a default option may be presented. Alternatively, the initial option may comprise a "select an option" message, wherein no option is returned to the web site if the user does not affirmatively select an option from the list. In either case, the user would mouse-click the associated arrow button, causing a drop-down menu to appear, containing all of the options. The user then selects a desired option from the drop-down menu with the mouse. Alternatively, the unique-choice selection may comprise radio buttons in HTML. Radio buttons present a series of text options to the user, with a "button" next to each option which may be selected, such as by moving the mouse over the button and clicking it. An inherent feature of radio buttons is that one and only one may be selected at a time. If one option in a set of radio buttons is selected, and another option is subsequently selected, the first option selection is cleared. Other alternatives include checkboxes, which operates a similar to radio buttons but allow multiple selections to be made. The underlying software, however, could be programmed to reject a many-of-many selection, forcing a one-of many-selection. As another alternative, multiple "submit" buttons may be presented, with a different option associated with each button. Selection of one of the buttons would typically cause a new web page to be displayed. These examples are intended to be illustrative only, and not limiting. Web site interaction is an ongoing and rapidly developing field. The use of Java and other programming languages allow for a rich and varied interaction environment. The essential characteristic of a "unique choice selection" is that a limited series of options are presented to the user, and the user may select one and only one of the options. Similarly, as used herein, the term "limited choice selection" refers to the presentation to the user of a limited series of options, wherein the user may select one or more of the options, up to the entire set, but his choices are limited to those options provided.

Following the presentation of detailed information about any state's motor vehicle laws, traffic offenses, insurance regulations, and similar information, the user may terminate his

interaction at the web site by simply not proceeding further, i.e., declining to select any menu buttons or hypertext links provided. Alternatively, the user may simply direct his web browser to another URL. In general, a user may terminate his interactions with the web site at anytime and from any screen. Hence, this option of control flow is not depicted in Figure 4, but is an inherent control flow option at every point. One function of the web site of the present invention is thus simply to serve as a web resource for information about traffic laws and violations thereof to the general public.

In addition to general information regarding the subject of motor vehicle laws and offenses, the web site presents the user a detailed explanation of the process of obtaining representation online. This may illustratively include an overview of the rights and responsibilities of each party, the fees involved, a definition of waivable offenses and brief discussion of the types of matters that can and cannot be handled through a web site, and similar information. The user may be presented with a map of the process, a flow chart, or similar graphic or diagrammatic indication that further explains the process and procedure.

If the user decides to proceed, he is presented with a screen for the entry of user information (see box 410). At least two fundamental types of information must be collected from the user: biographical information and case information. Biographical information includes, for example, the user's full name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, driver's license number, and the like. At least some of the biographical information is preferably entered via limited or unique choice selection(s) from menus. In particular, restricting parts of the address to the areas where the attorney is willing to provide representation or where the attorney has established associated counsel, protects the attorney from inadvertently accepting representation that he cannot discharge. For example, on a web site with statewide coverage, the user may be restricted in his choice of "county where the offense occurred" to a unique choice selection from a list of counties where representation is offered.

Case information includes all pertinent information about the traffic offense charged, including, for example, the offense, the cited speed, the time and date of the offense, the time and

date of the court appearance, the county in which the citation was issued, and the like. At least some of the case information is preferably entered via unique or limited choice selection(s) from menus. In particular, the list of waivable traffic offenses for each state is a finite set. Forcing the user to select from among these ensures that only representation for waivable traffic offenses, where no further contact with the driver is required, is established. A limited choice selection menu may be appropriate for the offense charged, as some clients may have been charged with multiple offenses on the same citation or relating to the same incident.

As this information is being entered, or alternatively at the completion of each entry screen as the information is submitted, various checks are performed on the information fields. To ensure accuracy and reduce errors and misinformation, range checks are performed on all relevant fields (see box 415). As used herein, "range checking" refers to validation of the syntax of the information entered as being compatible with that required. For example, range checking would detect as erroneous the entry of alphabetic characters in a date field. Errors of this type are flagged to the user and the user is directed to re-enter the data.

Additionally, the data's parameters are checked (see box 420). As used herein, "parameter checking" refers to validation of the information against predetermined parameters, beyond its being syntactically correct. For example, parameter checking would flag a date of birth less than 18 years prior to the current date, indicating that the user is a minor and unable to enter a legally binding contract. As another example, the web site may be programmed to reject any user whose court appearance date, as specified on his traffic citation, is less than 24 hours ahead of the current time and date, as the attorney would not have sufficient time to obtain the user's motor vehicle records and otherwise adequately prepare for court. Similarly, known conflicts of the time of appearance may be the subject of parameter checks. In particular embodiments, the web site parametric date and time checking may be tied to one or more attorneys' electronic calendars, thus automatically detecting and rejecting scheduling conflicts. As information technology relating to web sites continues to develop, additional screening tools may be deployed by the attorney as parameter checks to screen potential clients, all of which fall within the scope and spirit of the

present invention. Users whose information fails parameter checking are presented with a screen instructing them to call the attorney's office, for further assistance (see box 422). This effectively removes the user from the process of the present invention, and places him in the traditional law office practice model of direct contact with the attorney or his or her staff.

Following successful entry of all required user information, including those range checking and parameter checking against the information, selected portions of the collected information are republished to the user for verification (see box 425). The user must then affirmatively indicate the accuracy of the information before proceeding (see box 430). This step additionally insures accuracy and avoids errors and miscommunication due to erroneously entered information. The republication of information and requirement that the user verify the information as correct increases public confidence in the use of the web site of the present invention. The user acceptance of the republished information may, for example, be accompanied by brief affirmative certification next to the selection buttons indicating the information as correct, e.g., "I certify that the above information is accurate and correct." If the user indicates that the information is not completely correct, he is again presented with the user information entry screens (see box 410). The information entry fields may contain, as default values, the previously entered information, to prevent the user from having to retype the entire set of user information.

When the user indicates that both the biographical and case information are correct, he is presented with the documents necessary to establish representation and enable resolution of the matter (see box 435). These documents may illustratively include the representation agreement, setting out to see details of the representation, including the specific traffic offense or offenses, the scope of the attorney's authorization to act on behalf of the client, the fee, and similar matters as would be included in any similar representation agreement. Additionally, the web site may present to the user the written waiver as may be required by the court to allow the attorney to handle the matter without the appearance of the client. The client may additionally be presented with a release form authorizing the attorney to obtain the client's motor vehicle records, if necessary, under the rules and regulations of the motor vehicle administrative agency in the relevant state. In

general, the client will be presented with all agreements, contracts, forms, releases, waivers, and other such documents as are necessary to complete representation.

Following presentation of all relevant documents to the client, the client is provided with the option to agree to representation under the terms and conditions and for the fee described (see box 440). Above the selection buttons indicating agreement, may be displayed a written acceptance statement, e.g., "I hereby retain [the attorney] to represent me in the matter described above, under the terms and conditions stipulated." If the client declines representation, he is presented with a screen inviting him to call the attorney's office to discuss his concerns (see box 445). Thus, the attorney is offered the opportunity to clarify the documents to the client, or otherwise address the client's concerns.

Once the client has accepted representation by the attorney, the agreed-upon fee is collected. This may illustratively comprise obtaining the user's credit card account number and his authorization to charge the fee (see box 450). The credit card account number may be range checked as it is entered, or upon its submission. Upon receipt of the user's credit card number, the web site will proceed to process the transaction (see box 455). This step might occur at the web site, using automated credit card transaction processing procedures as are well known in the art and thus are not further explicated herein. Alternatively, the entire credit card transaction process may be performed by a third party, for example by transferring the user to the third party's web site.

If, for whatever reason, the credit card transaction is not authorized, the user is presented with a screen instructing him to call the attorney's office to otherwise arrange for payment of the fee (see box 460).

If the credit card transaction is authorized, the user is presented with a screen informing him that representation has been established, that the attorney will handle the user's ticket, thanking the user for his business, and similar messages (see box 465). The web site software will then immediately e-mail the client a receipt for the fee. If the client did not enter an e-mail address, a notice is e-mailed to the attorney's office, so that a receipt may be generated and mailed



to the client. A notice is e-mailed to the attorney informing him of the representation and including all biographical and case information obtained during the user's interaction at the web site. The attorney or his staff may enter the matter into the attorney's docket, or his or her docket may be automatically updated upon receipt of the e-mail or through direct interaction with the web site software.

As an alternative to accepting payment on-line, the web site may collect client information and obtain a representation agreement, then forward the information to the attorney. Using this client information, the attorney may perform a conflicts check, and then inform the client within some specified time period, e.g., 24 hours, whether or not the attorney will accept the case. If so, payment of the fee may then be accomplished through the web site, such as by entering a credit card account number, or by conventional means. In this case, the web site functions to establish only a provisional or contingent representation agreement, but still facilitates the representation in an efficient and cost effective manner by informing the client of the representation process, obtaining information from the client, having the client verify the information, and having the client agree to the contingent representation and to a fee.

In the broad practice of the present invention, the web site may offer representation to a widely dispersed range of drivers, i.e., on a statewide, regional, or national basis. In this case, the web site software may additionally automatically email or otherwise notify associated counsel in the jurisdiction where the offense occurred of the representation, including the client's biographical and case information. The associated counsel's docket may be automatically updated to include the case, and/or the associated counsel's fee (or an accounting thereof) may be automatically forwarded. A broad variety of notification, information transfer, and fee accounting arrangements are possible among and between the client and all associated counsel, depending on the needs and sophistication of information technology of each party. All such arrangements are within the scope and spirit of the present invention.

It is to be stressed that the above discussion does not describe in detail each and every embodiment or feature of the present invention. A web site according to the present invention may

include additional features and process steps above and beyond those described herein. Additionally, many of the described features and process steps may be omitted, combined, modified, performed in a different order, or otherwise differ while not departing from the scope and spirit of the present invention.

### **The Family of Associated Web Sites**

In another embodiment, a plurality of web sites cooperatively interoperate to direct clients over a wide geographic area to appropriate counsel for legal representation regarding waivable traffic offenses. Figure 5 depicts a hierarchy of interrelated web sites according to the present invention, indicated generally at 500. At the top hierarchical level is a national web site 510, providing national coverage. National web site 510 with, in this example, the domain name *e-speeder.com*, contains general information on motor vehicle laws and offenses, insurance implications, an overview of typical traffic courts, etc. National web site 510 also explains the concept of waivable offenses, and invites users to obtain representation for their waivable offenses by utilizing the features of the web site family. Users select a more restricted geographical area, such as a state, from a unique choice selection menu at national web site 510, which automatically transfers the user to one of a plurality of limited geography web sites 520.

In Figure 5, limited geography web sites 520 include statewide web sites *NCspeeder.com*, covering North Carolina, *CAspeeder.com*, covering California, and *DakotaSpeeder.com*, covering the region comprising North Dakota and South Dakota. Furthermore, Figure 4 depicts sub-state web sites 530, including *NORCALspeeder.com* covering Northern California and *SOCALspeeder.com*, covering Southern California. A user at the limited geography web site 520 *CAspeeder.com* would be presented with information on California motor vehicle law and insurance regulations, but would be prompted to select one of Northern or Southern California from a unique group selection menu to obtain representation, and would resultingly be linked to sub-state web site 530 *NORCALspeeder.com* or *SOCALspeeder.com*, as appropriate. Alternatively, the user at *CAspeeder.com* may select the county in which he received his citation,

and be directed to the appropriate sub-state web site 530 automatically. Alternatively or additionally, a user may select the county where his waivable traffic offense occurred directly from the national web site *e-speeder.com*, and be linked directly to *NORCALspeeder.com* or *SOCALspeeder.com*, as appropriate, bypassing the *CAspeeder.com* site. Where market needs and operating efficiency demand, additional web sites may be linked into the hierarchy at appropriate points, e.g., *Laspeeder.com* covering the Los Angeles area, and *BaySpeeder.com* covering the San Francisco Bay Area. This would allow each web site to be tailored to the local rules and practice procedures of the relevant jurisdiction, for example collecting and formatting information in a form most useful for the disposition of cases in that jurisdiction. In all cases, a user at the lowest level of hierarchy depicted in Figure 5 would be able to obtain legal representation for his waivable traffic offense at that web site. One or more web sites at a higher level in the hierarchy would link the user to the lowest level web site that covers the geographic area where his waivable traffic offense occurred.

It is appreciated that a broad array of hierarchical organizations is possible. Furthermore, the limited geography web sites 520 and sub-state web sites 530 may change their coverage areas as consumer demand and operating efficiencies dictate. Additional levels of hierarchy may be added, and existing levels of hierarchy may be collapsed. While organization generally along states is envisioned due to the fact that motor vehicle laws are state-specific, the present invention is not so limited. An additional feature of a hierarchical organization as shown in Figure 5 is that new web sites may be added incrementally, as the controlling attorney extends coverage by forging relationships with local associated counsel in expanded geographical areas. The organization also allows for economies of scale in advertising and promoting the services, as only the highest level site (*e-speeder.com*) need be promoted.

While the invention has been illustratively described herein with reference to specific elements, features and embodiments, it will be recognized that the invention is not thus limited in structure or operation, but that the invention is to be broadly construed consistent with the

disclosure herein, as comprehending variations, modifications and embodiments as will readily suggest themselves to those of ordinary skill in the art.

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of establishing legal representation between an attorney and a client concerning waivable traffic violations via a world wide web site, comprising:
  - a. providing general information to said client concerning traffic violations, and explaining the representation;
  - b. obtaining from said client biographical information and case information;
  - c. republishing said biographical information and case information to said client for verification;
  - d. providing said client a representation agreement if said client information and case information conform to predetermined parameters;
  - e. obtaining from said client affirmative acceptance of said representation agreement and an agreement to waive an appearance at court with respect to the waivable traffic violation;
  - f. obtaining from said client a fee; and
  - g. notifying said attorney of said representation and providing said attorney with said waiver and said client biographical information and case information;whereby all said method steps are performed via a world wide web site.
2. The method of claim 1, comprising the additional step of identifying to said client a specific attorney and information about said specific attorney, and wherein said representation agreement names said specific attorney.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said client biographical information includes information selected from the group consisting of client's name, address, telephone number, and drivers license number.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said case information includes information selected from the group consisting of the offense, the alleged speed if applicable, the county where said alleged violation occurred, and the court appearance date.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein said offense is a limited choice selection.
6. The method of claim 4, wherein said offense is a unique choice selection.
7. The method of claim 4, wherein said county is a unique choice selection.
8. The method of claim 1, wherein one of said predetermined parameters includes a limit on the time between the date of entry of said case information and said court appearance date.
9. The method of claim 1, wherein said representation agreement includes a release of said client's motor vehicle records.
10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of obtaining a fee from said client includes obtaining a credit card number from said client, and processing a credit card transaction through a merchant account, whereby said fee is credited to said attorney.
11. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of notifying said attorney of said representation and providing said attorney with said waiver and said client

biographical information and case information comprises sending email to said attorney.

12. A method of establishing via a world wide web site a legal representation agreement between a legal representative and an individual charged with a traffic violation where a court appearance with respect to the traffic violation is waivable, comprising:

- a. accessing the world wide web site;
- b. identifying the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation by inputting identifying information into one or more information fields of the world wide web site;
- c. identifying the waivable traffic violation by inputting information that identifies the waivable traffic violation with which the individual has been charged;
- d. acknowledging and agreeing, by the individual charged with the traffic violation, through the world wide web site that the individual waives appearing in court with respect to the charged waivable traffic violation and that the individual agrees for the legal representative to legally represent the individual relative to the waivable traffic violation charged; and
- e. providing for payment to the legal representative through the world wide web site.

13. The method of claim 12, including obtaining a list of traffic violation offenses along with the identification of individuals charged with said offenses for a certain period of time and thereafter contacting by direct mail selected individuals charged with certain

traffic violations and providing them with an identifier for said world wide web site, and inviting them to access said world wide web site.

14. The method of claim 13, including identifying in the direct mail the URL for said world wide web site.
15. The method of claim 12 wherein legal representation is limited to cases where the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation is of a certain age, the county where the traffic violation occurred falls within a select group of counties, and the time period between the time the individual seeks legal representation and the date of the court appearance with respect to the waivable traffic violation is greater than a predetermined time period.
16. The method of claim 12, including offering legal representation to a geographic region by associating with one or more associate legal representatives, with each associated legal representative serving a selected geographical area within the geographic region and wherein the method includes establishing a relationship between the legal representative and one or more associate legal representatives wherein traffic violations occurring within selected areas of the geographic region are handled by associate legal representatives assigned to that area.
17. The method of claim 12 wherein the individual charged with a waivable traffic violation is assigned an associate legal representative that is designated to handle



waivable traffic violations occurring in a geographical area where the waivable traffic violation occurred.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the world wide web site determines the geographic area where the waivable traffic violation occurred and automatically directs to the associated legal representative information identifying the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation and the identity of the waivable traffic violation.
19. The method of claim 12 wherein the step of identifying the waivable traffic violation comprises selecting the waivable traffic violation with which the individual was charged from a list of waivable traffic violations for which the legal representative will provide legal representation.
20. The method of claim 12 wherein information inputted by the individual is republished for verification by the individual prior to establishing legal representation with respect to the waivable traffic violation.
21. The method of claim 12 wherein said world wide web site forms a part of a family of world wide web sites which in the aggregate cover a geographic region and wherein certain individual world wide web sites of the family cover selected geographic areas within the geographic region.
22. A computer readable medium in the form of software for facilitating an agreement for legal representation between an individual charged with a waivable traffic violation and a legal representative, the software adapted to:

- a. receive an identification of the waivable traffic violation;
- b. communicate the identity of the waivable traffic violation to the legal representative;
- c. receive an agreement from the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation to waive appearing in court with respect to the waivable traffic violation; and
- d. receive an agreement from the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation permitting legal representation by said legal representative.

23. The computer readable medium of claim 22 wherein the software is further adapted to facilitate payment for the legal representation.

24. The computer readable medium of claim 23 wherein the software is adapted to receive a credit card account number and to assist in effectuating payment for the legal representation based on said credit card account number.

25. The computer readable medium of claim 22 wherein the software is further adapted to receive input information that identifies the waivable traffic violation with which the individual has been charged.

26. The computer readable medium of claim 25 wherein the software is further adapted to present a list of waivable traffic violation offenses and permit the selection of the waivable traffic violation with which the individual has been charged to be selected from the list.

27. The computer readable medium of claim 22 wherein the software is further adapted to receive information identifying the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation; and receive an agreement to pay a selected fee for legal representation relative to the waivable traffic violation.
28. The computer readable medium of claim 22 wherein the software defines one or more case screening parameters and functions to test certain inputted information against the case screening parameters in order to determine if legal representation can be offered to the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation.
29. The computer readable medium of claim 28 wherein the case screening parameters are selected from the group consisting of the age of the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation, the violation charged, the time period between the date of inputting the information and the court date associated with the waivable traffic violation, and the geographic location of the occurrence of the waivable traffic violation.
30. The computer readable medium of claim 22 further adapted to assign the individual to an associated legal representative based on geographical location where the waivable traffic violation occurred.
31. The computer readable medium of claim 22 further adapted to republish inputted information to the individual for verification prior to establishing legal representation with respect to the waivable traffic violation.

32. A method of using a computer to facilitate establishing an agreement for legal representation between a legal representative and an individual charged with a waivable traffic violation, comprising:

- a. inputting into the computer the identity of the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation;
- b. inputting into the computer the identity of the waivable traffic violation;
- c. inputting into the computer an agreement by the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation to waive a court appearance with respect to the traffic violation;
- d. inputting into the computer an agreement by the individual charged with the waivable traffic violation to permit the legal representation with respect to the waivable traffic violation; and
- e. inputting into the computer information that permits payment to be made to the legal representative for such representation.

33. The method of claim 32 wherein the step of inputting the identity of the waivable traffic violation includes reviewing a list of waivable traffic violations and selecting from the list a waivable traffic violation that matches the waivable traffic violation with which the individual is charged.

34. The method of claim 32 wherein after the individual has agreed to waive court appearance and to legal representation, communicating to the legal representative information identifying the individual and the waivable traffic violation as well as case

information setting forth the name and location of the court scheduled to hear the waivable traffic violation charge and the date of such hearing.

35. The method of claim 32 wherein the method employs a group of legal representatives disbursed over a geographical region with each legal representative assigned to handle waivable traffic violation cases in one or more geographical areas; and wherein an individual charged with a waivable traffic violation is directed to a legal representative based on the geographical location where the waivable traffic violation occurred.
36. The method of claim 32 including republishing certain information inputted into the computer relating to the identity of the individual and the waivable traffic violation, and after republishing the information requesting the individual to verify that the republished information is correct.
37. The method of claim 32 wherein said computer forms a part of a world wide web site and wherein the method further includes from time to time obtaining a list of individuals that have been charged with a waivable traffic violation, communicating with one or more of the individuals via direct mail, and through the direct mail inviting the one or more individuals to visit said world wide web site for the purpose of considering possible legal representation by the legal representative.

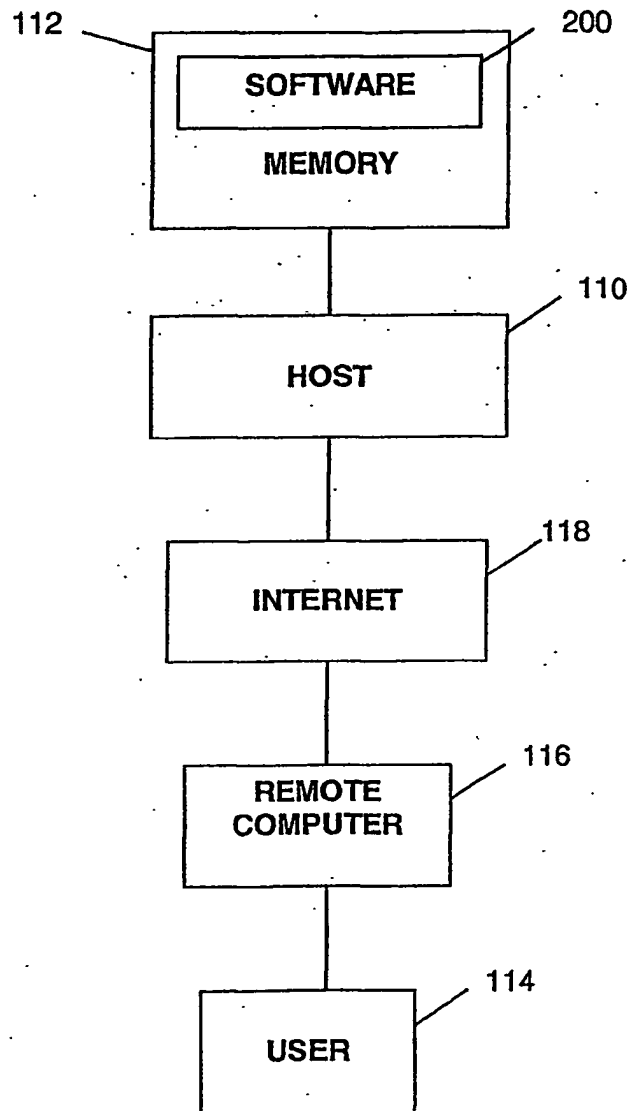


Figure 1

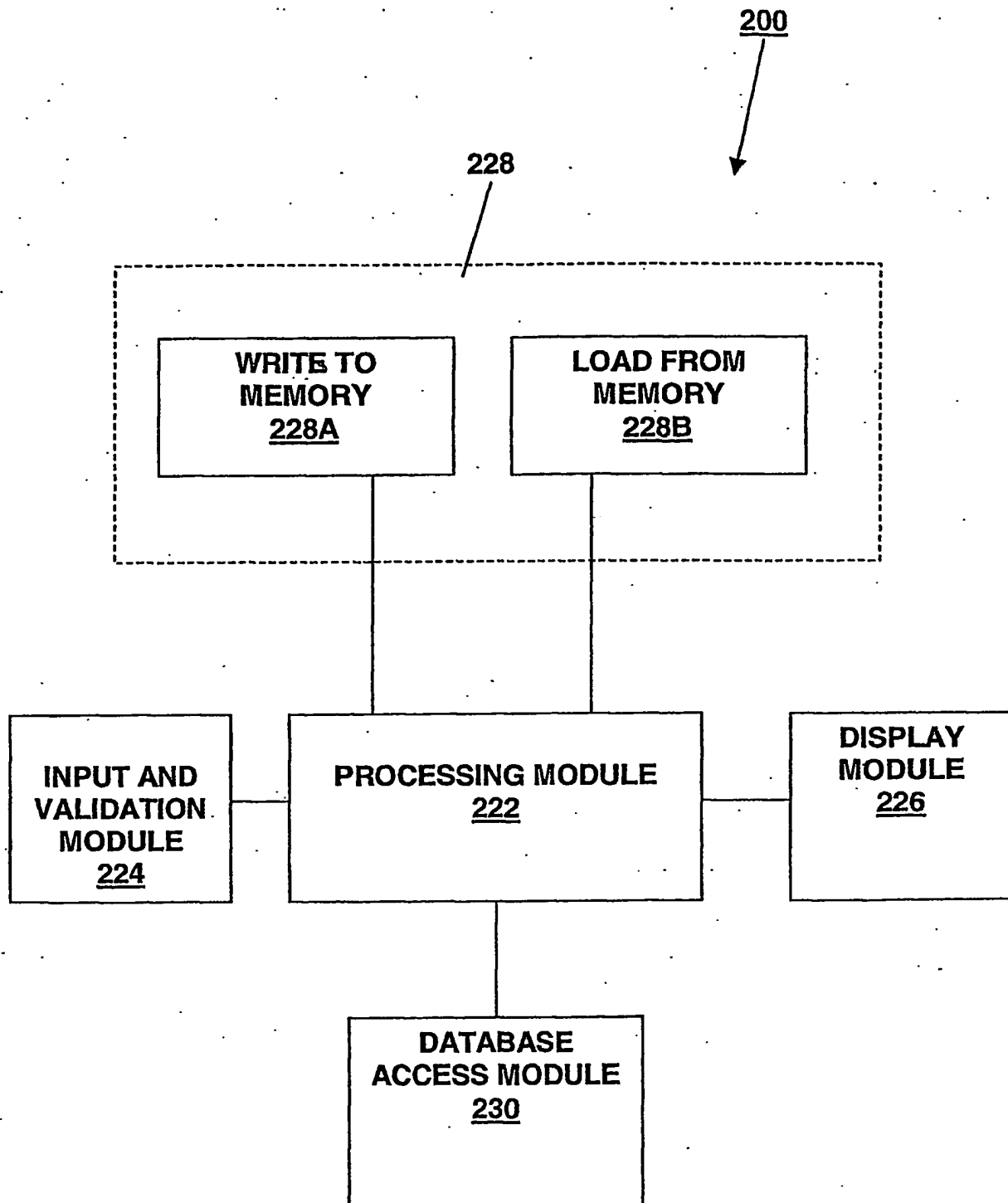


FIGURE 2

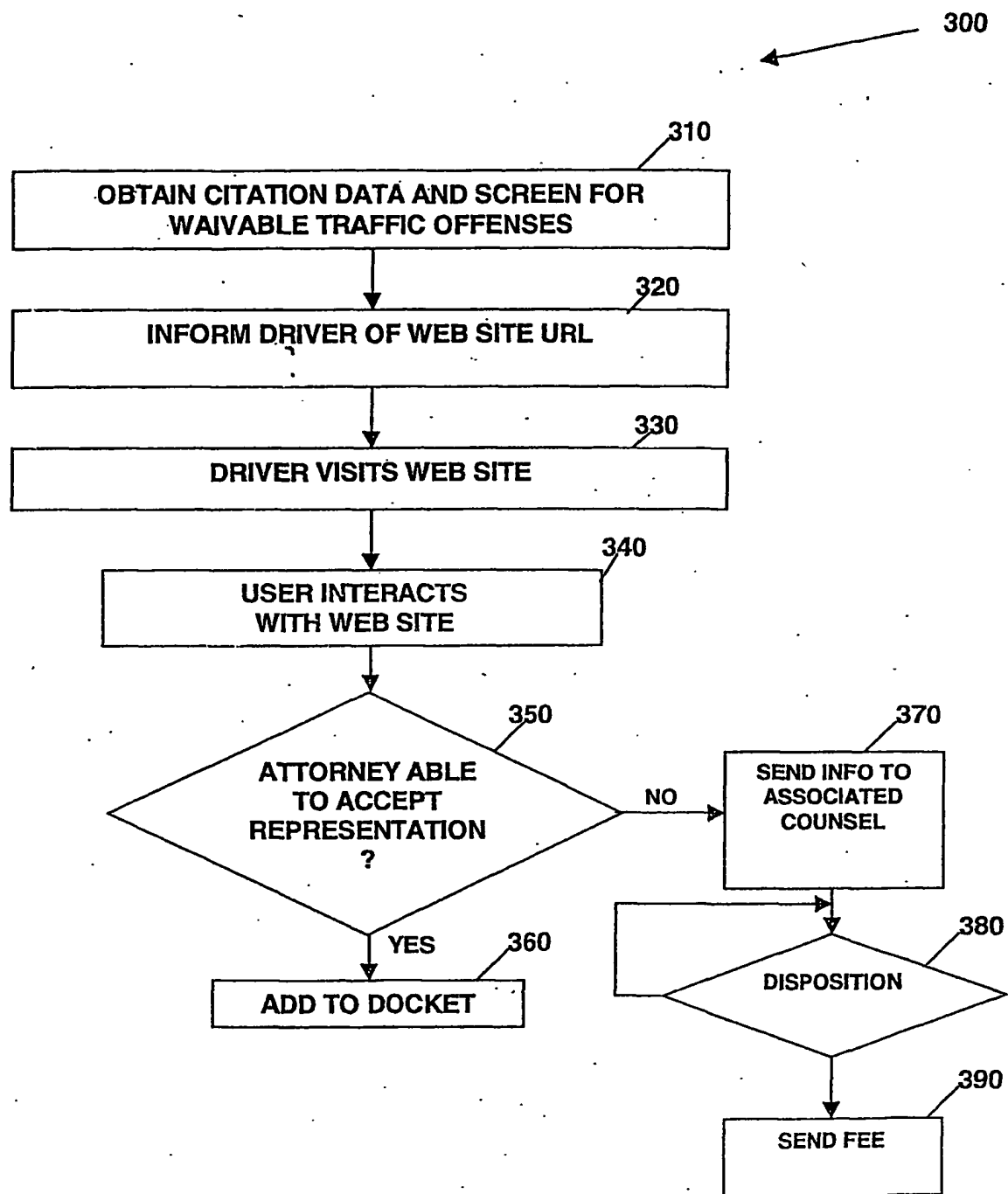


FIGURE 3



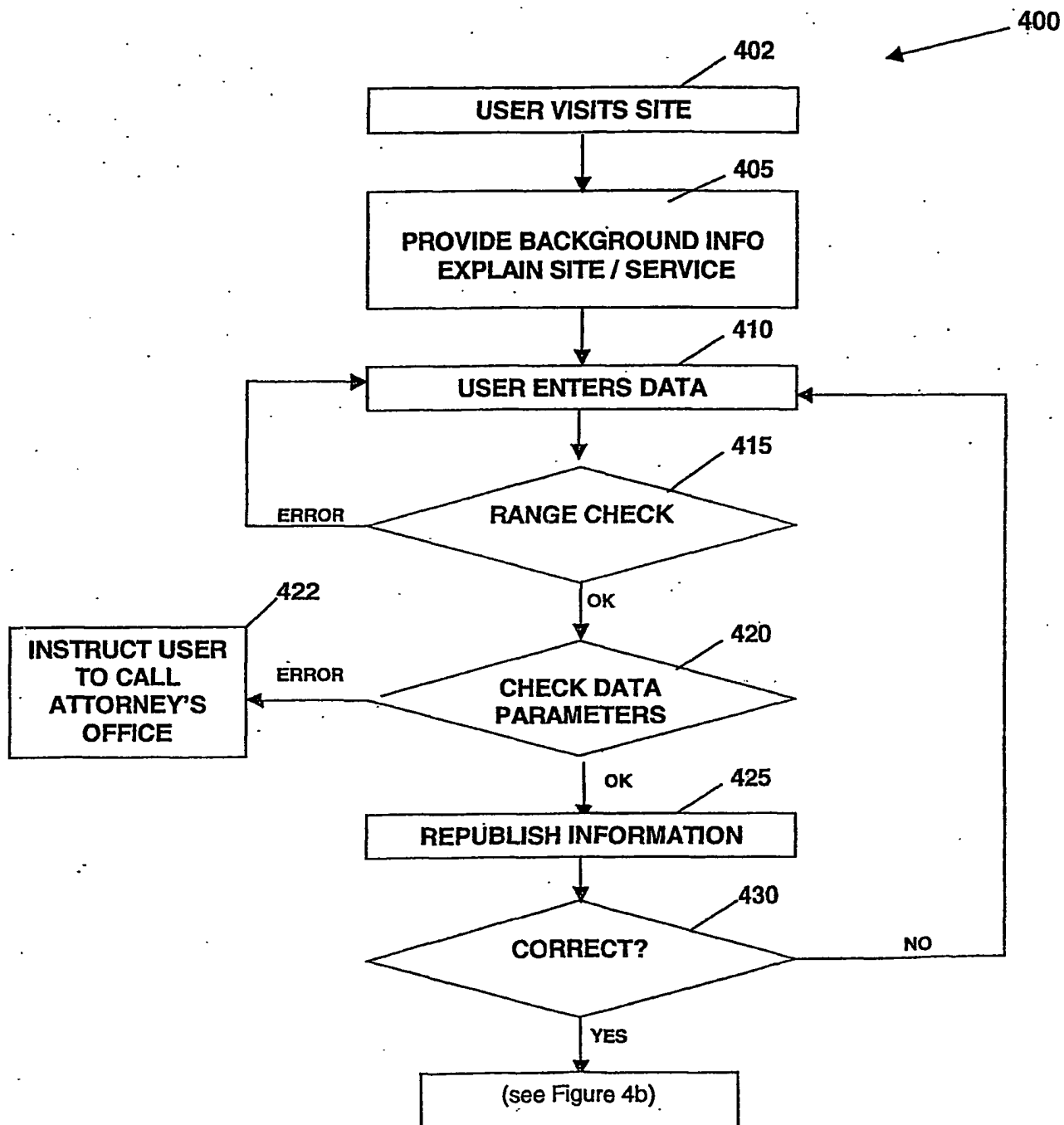


FIGURE 4a

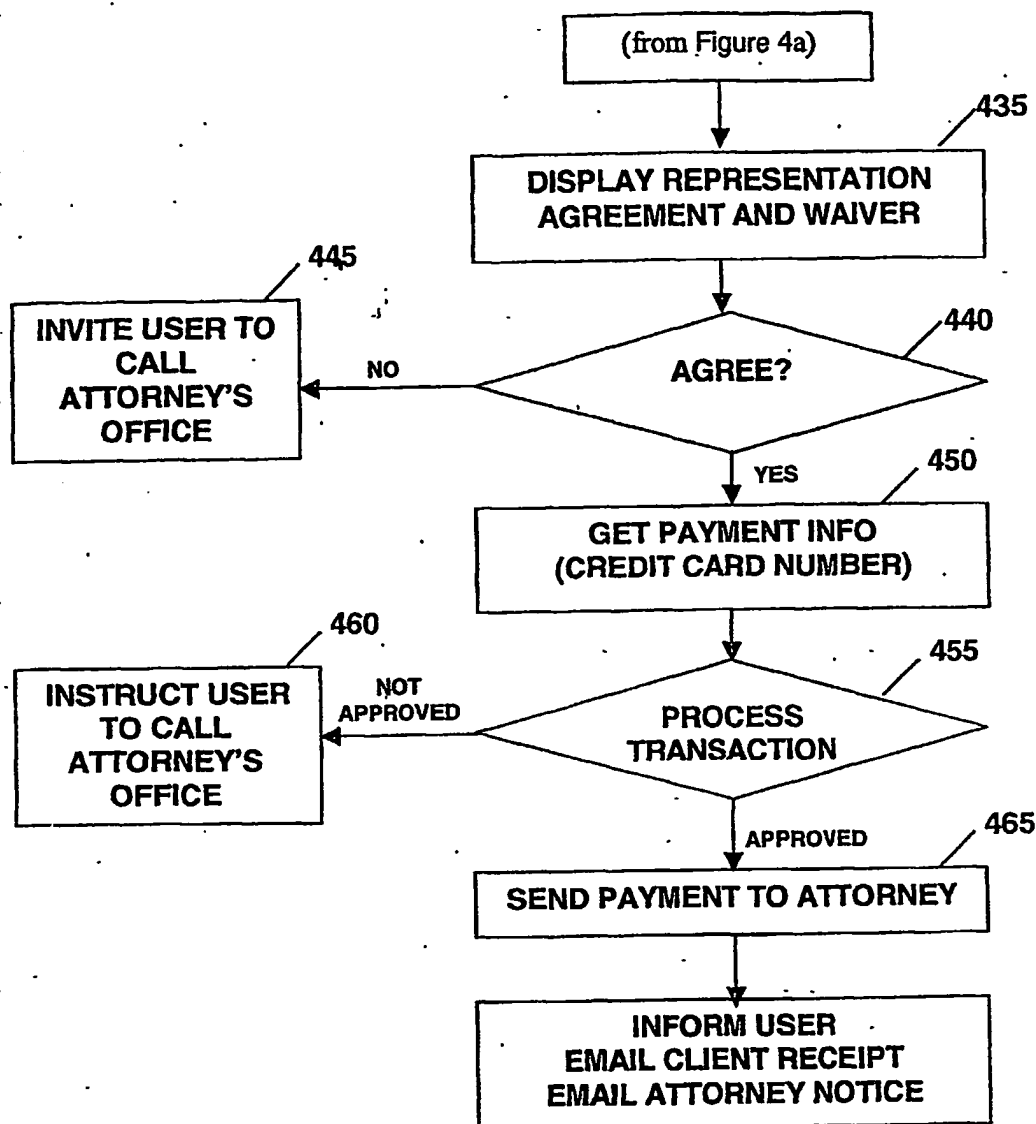


FIGURE 4b

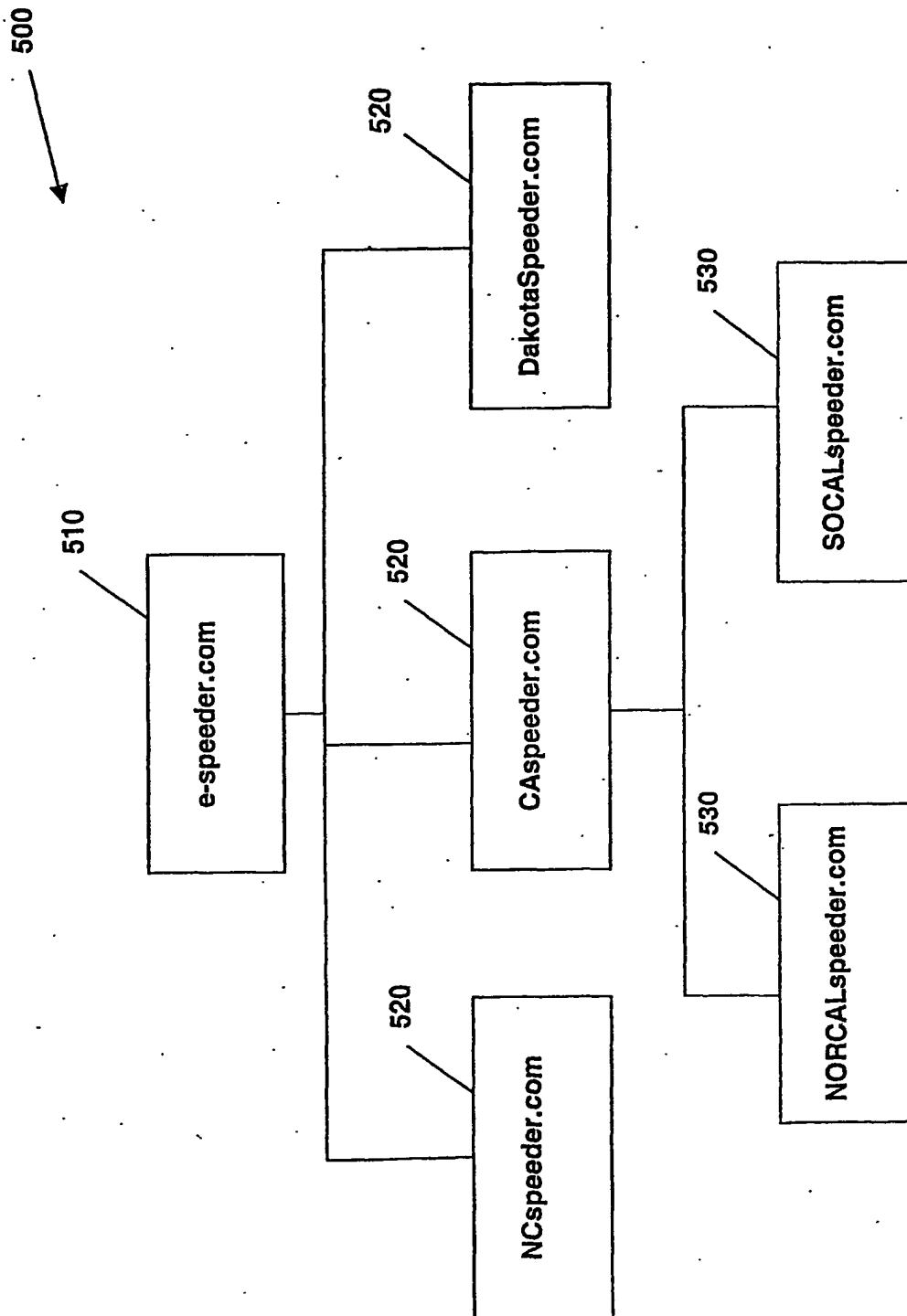


FIGURE 5

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/41842

## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G06F 17/60

US CL : 705/1

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/1, 705/8, 705/9

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)  
Please See Continuation Sheet

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,875,431 A (HECKMAN et al.) 23 February 1999 (23.02.99) abstract; figures 1-5(2); column 1, lines 15-33; column 2, lines 33-67; column 3, lines 59-67; column 4, lines 1-67; column 9, lines 21-67; column 10, lines 1-55; column 11, lines 1-47; column 13, lines 30-67; column 14, lines 1-67; column/lines 15/1-18/35; column 19, lines 26-67; column 20, lines 1-35; column 21, lines 15-67; column 22, lines 1-67; column 23, lines 15-67; column 24 lines 1-67	1-37
Y	US 5,943,652 A ((SISLEY et al.) 24 August 1999 (24.08.99) abstract; figures 1,2, 9 and 10; column 5, lines 20-67; column 6, lines 1-67; column 7, lines 44-57; column 9, lines 14-61;	1-37

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

08 November 2001 (08.11.2001)

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Jim P Trammell

Telephone No. 703-305-3900

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/41842

Continuation of B. FIELDS SEARCHED Item 3:

WEST

search terms: legal analysis, legal advice, internet, representation

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